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FM AMCONSUL JEDDAH
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9142
INFO RUCNISL/ISLAMIC COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 1370
RUEHML/AMEMBASSY MANILA PRIORITY 0006
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS PRIORITY 1448
RUEHRH/AMEMBASSY RIYADH PRIORITY 6479
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RHEHAAA/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L JEDDAH 000352

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RIYADH, PLEASE PASS TO DHAHRAN; DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/ARP,
DRL/IRF; PARIS FOR ZEYA; LONDON FOR TSOU

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/09/2016

TAGS: [KIRF](#) [KISL](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [RP](#) [SA](#) [SOCI](#)

SUBJECT: PHILIPPINE PRESIDENT ARROYO'S VISIT TO KINGDOM
ACCOMPANIED BY RELEASE OF FILIPINO PRISONERS. IS RELIGIOUS
PERSECUTION DIMINISHING?

REF: A. JEDDAH 237
[1](#)B. JEDDAH 308
[1](#)C. JEDDAH 328
[1](#)D. RIYADH 2237
[1](#)E. RIYADH 2737
[1](#)F. RIYADH 3145

Classified By: Consul General Tatiana Gfoeller, for
reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: The Saudi government marked the state
visit of Philippine President Arroyo by pardoning more than
500 Filipinos; many more than had been specifically requested
by Arroyo. ConGen contacted a source in the Jeddawi Filipino
community to determine if religious detainees had been
included among those pardoned. The source responded that to
his knowledge no Filipinos were currently being held for
religious violations, although this source had recently
expressed concerns about religious persecution. These
pardons suggest that the Saudi government is seeking to
improve its relations with the Philippines as part of its
recently launched "Eastern Strategy."

SAUDIS PARDON MORE FILIPINOS THAN ARROYO REQUESTS

[1](#)2. On her arrival in Saudi Arabia, Philippine President
Arroyo presented the king with a request for pardons for 50
Filipinos being held in Saudi jails. King Abdullah
immediately released 138. By the time Arroyo returned to the
Philippines, she announced that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
had released between 500 and 700 Filipinos from detention.
Reports stated that 10 of the Filipinos had been charged with
homicide, for whom the King paid the blood money.
Seventy-five were runaway servants who had taken refuge at
the Philippine Consulate General in Jeddah. The remainder
had been charged with a variety of "cultural crimes,"
including: drinking or producing alcohol, cockfighting,
gambling and bringing Christian religious items into the
Kingdom.

JEDDAWI SOURCE CLAIMS RELIGIOUS PERSECUTION HAD DISAPPEARED
BEFORE PRESIDENT'S ARRIVAL

[1](#)3. The Consulate General contacted a local Filipino source,
who is a covert Christian preacher, to learn if these pardons
included Filipinos charged with religious crimes (reftels).
This source responded that he was not aware of anyone

currently being detained for religious reasons. After further inquiries among his contacts around the Kingdom, he reported that there were no such cases and went on to say that his community had been treated "leniently" since the new king ascended the throne. NOTE: These statements contradict comments this same source made to ConGenOff only two weeks earlier (reftel D), in which he had described widespread anxiety within the Filipino community over religious and racial persecution by Saudi authorities. Furthermore, this source had participated in earlier meetings openly and with no sign of personal apprehension. On this occasion, the source insisted on telephoning the Consulate General to confirm the identity of Pol/Econ Chief, before offering his opinions. This change in attitude prompts Jeddah to view his remarks with caution. ConGen Jeddah will continue to pursue this subject in the future. END NOTE.

SAUDIS APPARENTLY SERIOUS ABOUT IMPROVING RELATIONS WITH
ASIAN NATIONS

14. (C) COMMENT: Saudi Arabia's release of so many more Filipinos than requested by President Arroyo, coupled with the King's willingness to pay blood money for 10 alleged murderers and to charter a plane to fly one contingent of Filipinos to the Philippines to arrive immediately after the President, is evidence of the Kingdom's interest in currying good relations with the Government of The Philippines and furthering its new "Eastern Strategy" of strengthening ties with Asian countries. END COMMENT.
Gfoeller